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# LETTER

TO

MR. STICKNEY, OF HOLDERNESS,

ON

EMIGRATION TO CANADA,

BY

JOHN MEWBURN,

OF NIAGARA, UPPER CANADA, AND LATE OF  
WHITBY, YORKSHIRE.

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## A LETTER &c.

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Niagara District, Upper Canada,  
February 6th, 1833.

MY DEAR SIR,

When I had the pleasure of an interview with you previous to my leaving England for Upper Canada, in March last, you expressed a wish to hear my opinion on the very important subject of Emigration to this province, for a family of respectability; and as I had similar requests from persons of all classes, the present will perhaps be the best mode of answering all: and I flatter myself that the knowledge I have acquired of the country, and which I am happy to communicate to all who may be inclined to follow, will be the means of placing matters in their true light as regards the measure: having no wild lands to sell, no town or village to found, no visionary schemes to further at the expense of the unwary, I trust the following remarks will prove to be correct, just, and true. Satisfied with my "own lot" I have no desire to mislead the stranger, by promising him "improbabilities," but, I will give him the result of some experience, (*for which I have paid a price,*) collected in my voyages and travels throughout the country, from men of all ranks and classes, in company with men of shrewd sense and intelligence, who, like myself, were seeking a resting place in a "strange land." On the subject of Emigration, I cannot do better than quote the opinion of a very clever gentleman, a resident of twenty years standing, who in his correspondence says "that no English family of respectabi-

lity should leave the advantages and comforts they may possess at home, except under such circumstances as when they can no longer be supported by an adequate revenue, or when it is seen that by lingering *too long, all may be lost!* With a much smaller *capital and income* than in England, every comfort, nay every luxury may be obtained in Upper Canada; and surplus capital can be employed to very great advantage." This I believe is honest and ought to weigh well with those who think of leaving home; for *self interest* predominates here in so truly a wonderful manner, that it is very difficult to procure a correct statement from writers and authors in Canada—a secret all new comers with cash will very speedily discover! To the above I will add from *personal observation*, that there appears in this happy country, a freedom from those annoying and perplexing cares, which as a canker destroy the peace of mind of every parent *at home*, solicitous for the future welfare of a large family. Here are no signs of absolute poverty and distress, no parish paupers, no beggars—except in the large towns—no very rich—with some exceptions—and no very poor people! *All may obtain employment*; and instances of death from the want of the necessities of life, are quite unknown. The climate in summer is delightful; in spring and fall, wet and unpleasant; but in winter all agree, that it is pleasant and agreeable: though we have observed little difference between the climate here and at home, except that the cold is much more intense. When the snow falls and becomes well hardened, sleighing commences immediately; and certainly no other mode of travelling can compete with it for ease, comfort, and expedition: then the store-houses of plenty appear to be opened in all directions, and the contents exchanged for the manufactured goods of old England. Fever and ague are the common diseases, but, I learn, not so prevalent as formerly, except in marsh or new cleared lands: in winter, inflammations; in summer and autumn, billious and remittant fevers prevail, exactly similar to those in England. In many

parts, society is as good and genteel as elsewhere; the same courtesies and habits of life are observed: the ladies are highly polished in their manners, agreeable in conversation, dutiful daughters, and exemplary wives: the gentlemen are equally pleasant and sociable. The traveller who brings an introduction is sure of meeting with a kind and friendly reception, and every information relative to his views will be afforded him. The manners of the yeomanry or farmers class, (I speak of those among whom I reside,) are generally of a more polished caste than those of our acquaintance at home, yet they have some peculiarities and habits, of which an englishman and a stranger, cannot approve. In their houses they are particularly hospitable, and ready to assist each other to the utmost of their power. Ample opportunities are afforded for the instruction of youth of both sexes; the college at York, with professors from Oxford and Cambridge, where every branch of literature is taught at an expense much less than in England: seminaries for young ladies in York, Niagara, and the "Falls"—the latter situation the healthiest part of the province, and in magnificent scenery, equal to any in the world, where a family highly educated, lately from the south of England, have taken pupils—remove any objections or fears on this head. District schools are formed in all parts, but they seem to be conducted very improperly. Clergymen of the church of England are distributed throughout the country, while dissenters, methodists, and Roman Catholics abound. In travelling, the *gentleman* must be prepared to meet with many disagreeables and provocations which he will do well to avoid noticing—it will save him some additional mortification. An englishman will frequently be treated with much rudeness and incivility from the owner of a tavern, and within difference and inattention to his "wants" perfectly incomprehensible: but this will soon be removed by a few expressions of kind *gentlemanly* greetings on the part of the traveller—a little "*smoothing down*"—a few friendly remarks, with a

*polite request* will, in a few moments, effect an astonishing change in the countenance and manners of "mine host"; and he will then obtain what he requires, save and except a comfortable bed and clean linen—articles quite unknown in a Canadian tavern. The former circumstances are said to be owing to *certain pioneers* who were too much in the habit of shewing off when from home; hence a prejudice has been excited against a plain well-behaved English gentleman, which I have reason to believe is fast wearing away. The gentleman must overcome his natural repugnance to find himself in company with "creeping things innumerable" in his bed, tormenting him till he rises, unrefreshed by sweet slumbers, to seek relief from the "morning air." He must not be surprised to hear himself addressed as "this ere man" who wants something of "that there gentleman;" it must be understood at once, there is the utmost difference in the meaning of the word *here* and in *England*! A Canadian bar room is frequently filled with these worthies who spend their time generally in disgusting intoxication, and many even take pleasure in insulting a well-dressed stranger. He will frequently be detained many hours, and even days, in these post-houses, or pay a most exorbitant sum for a miserable conveyance particularly if he evinces some natural desire to leave his quarters in a hurry! In many places, the "back settlements" especially, his ears will be shocked with horrid disgusting language, interlarded with oaths the most awful and extraordinary, and should the parties "shew fight," let him avoid the slightest interference. The roads are very bad, but it is said an improvement will be shortly made: they cannot well be worse. There seems a perfect recklessness and indifference to life among those in authority in this country, perfectly astonishing to a stranger, or the roads and bridges would not present so many appearances of danger, which at the cost of a little labour might soon be repaired. Accidents frequently occur, and though occasionally attended with the loss of life, no steps are taken to pre-



vent a recurrence. One of the greatest troubles and vexations which an emigrant meets with (*all classes are included*) on his arrival in the country, is the want of accommodation for his family: even in York, the seat of government, lodgings were not to be obtained when I arrived there; empty houses can rarely be hired—he is reduced to the unpleasant necessity of quartering in a tavern, which is very expensive and generally very unpleasant: hence the miseries and inconveniences of a new comer accustomed to the comforts of home, with a family brought up in the courtesies of life, are intolerable, and cause much and deserved dissatisfaction. I ought to add that the word *comfort* as understood in old England, has no such signification in this country, either as to lodging or cooking, &c., except among the higher classes of society. Servants are complained of, and *not without reason*; they are lazy, independent, and saucy, seldom remaining long in one place, with no bond of affection between them and their masters, the former considering themselves equal in respectability, and generally disdain the term, servant, styling themselves "*helps*." The expenses of travelling are very great, arising from the immense distance of places. The most serious mistakes which are made by emigrants, are in the amount of money or capital, which they are told, by those interested in misleading them, is necessary to bring with them: *viz.*—that if a labourer or mechanic has only the use of his hands on his arrival, and the gentleman possesses £500. or £600. they have all that is required. These are I fearlessly assert, *falsehoods*, calculated to bring the greatest misery and distress on all those who are so credulous to believe them; the latter often become with this inadequate sum, a prey to those, who, under specious pretexts and promises, induce them to purchase farms, which they must mortgage, and which ultimately, returns to the *decoy*, while the unfortunate dupe, finding his hopes and sanguine expectations of realizing a comfortable independence, from the wreck of his property in England, vanish from his

eyes, gives himself up to intoxication and despair; poor men have been induced to purchase wild lands, who, when a moderate clearance has been effected, and improvements made, such as to enhance the value of the property, have been suddenly compelled to give up possession for a more wealthy customer!! No labouring man or mechanic with a large family, should venture here, without having from £10. to £20. after landing at Quebec; a farmer, one of our smaller class, £200., the better sort, £500.; and a gentleman who has a family to maintain, from £800. to £1000., together with a permanent income of from £50. to £150. per annum. It will be seen that I disapprove here distinctly of overseers sending out *penniless paupers* to Canada. The sufferings and distresses of this latter class were awful during the last year (to my own knowledge,) while travelling up the Saint Lawrence, enduring all the horrors of famine—exposed to the burning sun by day, and the heavy dews by night—refused relief by the inhabitants of Lower Canada,—they became an easy prey to the awful scourge of Cholera, and hundreds perished in their wearying efforts to reach the “promised land:” those who escaped and arrived in York, found their expectations dissipated in discovering the imposition practised upon them. Labour was not in the demand, nor wages so high as expected. By the exertions of the government assisted by the charitable donations of the rich, the poorer emigrants were distributed to those places where their services were required. Much suffering and want would have been saved to each family, had they possessed even less than I have named. The poorer farmer will find it his interest to hire himself for a year before he settles: he will learn the customs of the country, and be enabled to work his own ground to more advantage. The other will have much to struggle with, he will have to labour hard, early, and late, and be very sober and economical, before he can call the farm his own. He will find I have not overrated the sum required, and will speedily discover the diffi-



culty of paying up his instalments by the produce of his land. He should purchase a farm half cleared, near a market, where he can *obtain dollars* for his grain. Property of this description will sometimes be met with on reasonable terms, from £300. to £600., according to the situation and neighbourhood. The gentleman if he intends following agriculture—and I could not honestly advise him to follow any other pursuit *with safety*—will find a farm of 100 acres, half cleared, amply sufficient to maintain his family in all the requisites of good living; but he must not expect to do much more. Should he desire to place himself in a pleasant healthy neighbourhood, near a public road, where there is good society, and a good house to receive his family at once, he must expect to pay for all these advantages a good round sum—from £1000. to £1200.: and as his expenses for stocking his farm, implements of husbandry, &c., besides the keep of his family for the first year, must be very considerable, such a person will cut a very indifferent figure with £500! I am aware he may go further back, or even into the *bush*, but I trust no gentleman with a well-educated family will ever think of trying this experiment. The miseries, wretchedness, and sufferings attending it, mental, as well as bodily, cannot be expressed: rather suffer all the hardships and degradation of dependence in England, than this. I give this advice from those who were persuaded to try the pleasures of a residence in the Gore of Toronto, and others who fancied the western parts, but wisely returned. My honest conviction is, that for the labourer and mechanic, there is ample employment and fair wages, generally a dollar, 8s. York, per day; for the farmer, a comfortable living, with a certainty of seeing his sons and daughters settle around him; and for the gentleman with the property, I have named, a *perfect independence*, and a happiness to which he has long been a stranger. For his sons, the professions, trades, merchandize, and agriculture, are all open. He must think it no degradation to drive his own team, or su-

perintend his workmen in the field: if too proud or too indolent, little success can be expected here. Farming pursuits may be conducted in this country to a great extent: the same mode of culture may be advantageously employed, as at home, and as there are neither tythes nor poor rates to burthen a farm of 300 to 400 acres, it will not be attended with so much expense. I am satisfied that a practical English farmer who possesses capital, and has two or three active and intelligent sons, who would apply themselves diligently to the work, would realize a handsome property in a few years. If there are any of the above who find it difficult to maintain a fair position at home, and who are prepared to undergo the dangers of the sea, and the route upwards—the miseries and inconveniences—the mortification and vexations, which occur to all who do venture—with *cheerfulness, good nature, and patience*, let them come to Upper Canada, for I can assure them when once fairly settled, *care and anxiety are at an end*; and in my humble opinion, they will find the change much to their own and their children's advantage. Men of capital, and artisans of *every description*, are much wanted in all parts of the province. Those who possess funds, should pay the same into Messrs Thomas Wilson's Bank, Warford's Court, London, Agent to the Canada Bank; and should come by New York, from thence to Oswego, Lake Ontario, or Buffaloe, by the Erie Canal. After arriving in the province, they will find it best to leave their families in quarters, if they can be procured, and travel through the country. Be not hasty in deciding, nor trust any one in the choice or purchase of a situation, from the *highest person* in the realm, to the meanest. Make enquiries of all, and look well around. Those who judge it best to come by the Saint Lawrence, will find I understand better modes of conveyance than was experienced before I came. Improvements are making, which will be more expeditious, more comfortable, and less hazardous to the traveller and his family; yet with all these "*fair promises*," I

do sincerely advise all who can, to come *via* New York. The dangers we endured in journeying up the river, and its banks, can only be understood by those who have tried its perils.

No enquiry should be made by emigrants, at Quebec or Montreal, as to lands, modes of conveyance, &c. except of the gentlemen appointed by his Majesty's government. This is my honest conviction, and I recommend those who follow, to adopt my advice. I sincerely hope, the candid statement here offered to those in the old country, whose means of subsistence and capital are fast decreasing, and who have families to provide for, will induce them to prefer the beautiful and happy province of Upper Canada for a permanent residence, to dependence and want at home. If the wife only is persuaded that by some severe privations, vexations, and sacrifice of feeling in separating from her near relations and friends, she can lay the foundation of her children's future prosperity and comfortable independence—let no husband be afraid to venture. There are few I think would hesitate to make the change. I have met with very few, who have regretted their lot: almost all classes express themselves as happy and content, and in my humble opinion, why should they not? For myself and family, I can truly say, (with some sorrowful and distressing exceptions, but to which we have endeavoured to submit in patience and resignation, though the trials have been severe and heart-rending indeed,) we have reason to be well satisfied with Upper Canada. In a beautiful healthy village, amid excellent society, and kind friends of the most respectable class, we observe little difference, between our present situation, and home. If my sons are industrious, there will be little fear of their future success, while for myself, I have strong reason to believe, I shall do well in this "land of promise." The kind and friendly letters of introduction with which I was favoured, insured me in all parts a hearty welcome; and, on my settling, brought me into immediate practice. I sincerely hope that,

what I have stated, may not induce any one hastily to leave his native land. Those who can live well at home should remain: those who cannot, should come to Upper Canada.

Having thus described, in truth and sincerity, the "bitters and the sweets" of emigration, I have only to express my desire that I may not be misunderstood: satisfied with my own lot, I have no desire, no interested motive, to exaggerate or injure my friends.

I am, &c., &c.,

**JOHN MEWBURN.**

**FINIS.**